4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

gigantic. The mainmast on a large two-masted dhow is about seventy-five per cent of the overall length of the craft; for a 150-ton dhow it is a massive tree trunk that will tower more than seventy-five feet above the deck and have a diameter of over two feet. The mast is not tapered much, being only slightly smaller at the top than at the bottom. The huge size is necessitated by the fact that, because of the way the Arabs sail, the mast must at times stand unsupported with the sail raised and working. The main yard is equally massive, attaining almost the overall length of the vessel but having a diameter only about one-half that of the mast. The yard is a tapered spar made of stout poles fished and lashed together. On a 150-ton dhow the main yard may weigh over three thousand pounds and the largest mainsail may weigh up to one thousand pounds. This four-thousand-odd pounds of teakwood and cloth is raised solely by manpower using a two-part, twofold purchase.

When the dhow is ready to sail, the longboat must be hoisted and stowed, and the anchors must be raised. In rough weather a large dhow may lay down four or more anchors, as the moorings are usually foul. The anchors are raised to the surface without any tackle, and then they may be brought aboard by a fall from the masthead.

Before the mainsail may be raised on an ocean-going dhow the huge sail must be bent to the massive yard by a series of robands along the whole head. After the sail is bent to the yard, it is secured lightly in stops, so that the yard may be hoisted with the sail neatly furled on it. After the yard is finally mastheaded and the halliards belayed, the sail may be released by a tug on the sheet, which breaks the sail out of the stops. The sheet acts as a rip cord and sends the sail billowing out like a parachute; if the breeze is light, the sail will flutter out like a flag, but if the breeze is fresh, the sail will open with a cannon-like roar. On smaller coastal dhows the sail is not gathered onto the yard in stops, the yard being simply raised with the sail in sailing position.

However, the yard and the sail are by no means raised as easily as one might gather from reading the preceding. As was pointed out above, the yard and sail on a 150-ton dhow may weigh over four thousand pounds and are hoisted by sheer manpower, using only a two-part, twofold purchase. Raising the yard and sail is a great occasion on any dhow, large or small—not by way of celebration, but because it represents so much work. There is a great ritual in hoisting the yard, the ritual becoming more important the larger the dhow. With the order to raise the yard, the sailors start a native song and dance; the pace quickens, and at an appointed place in the singing the sailors fall to the halliards. The halliards are at-

533 tacked almost savagely as the men chant praises to Allah and stamp the
535 deck as they shuffle by for another chance at the halliard. When the yard,
502 with the sail gathered in stops, is halfway up, the sailors may stop working and go into a dance, snapping their fingers and stamping the deck. On a large ocean-going dhow of 150 tons, it takes a whole hour to masthead the yard—about one-third of which is spent in dancing and singing. On a smaller dhow there is much less organization in raising the sail, but it is usually done faster with less song and dance.

502 Once the sail is raised and the dhow is under way, the sailors' duties are usually completed for a considerable length of time. However, if the weather changes, the sail may have to be changed. Once under way it may take several hours on a large dhow to lower one sail and replace it with a smaller (or larger) sail. The course may also have to be changed at times, regardless of weather changes. The Arab dhow tacks by wearing while sailing downwind; in wearing all hands have appointed stations, where stays, tacks, and sheets must be shifted.[49]

501 There is one more important duty carried out semiannually on the great ocean-going dhows running to and from Africa and India: that is cleaning the bottom. The bottom is usually cleaned and refinished before the dhow makes its return trip (from Africa or India) and after it has finished its seasonal trip. The dhow is moved into a shelving beach at high tide, and the ship is lightened as much as possible by the removal of any cargo and its yards, which are lowered overboard. The mainmast is lowered in its gear to the aft of the V-shaped trough in which it rests. Sometimes, depending on the dhow, it is necessary to completely unship the mast; at other times it is sufficient simply to lower it so that its resistance to the wind (and thus its toppling effect) is at a minimum. It should be remembered that the mast on a medium-sized ocean-going dhow is a massive teakwood spar weighing around five tons, while on a large dhow it may run well over ten tons.

When the dhow is lightened sufficiently, it is kedged into shallow water to the songs and chants of the crew laboring on the anchor lines. With the falling tide, mangrove pole props are lashed along the gunwales on each side so that as the tide leaves the vessel dry, it is propped up on stilts. With each successive tide change, the stilts must be carefully reset, as the vessel is partially refloated. To allow a large dhow to topple over is a serious matter, as it may have to lie there until a spring tide lifts it.

When the tide has receded sufficiently, the sailors set to work remov-

[49] For a description of 'wearing' see R. LeB. Bowen, Jr., 'Arab Dhows of Eastern Arabia,' American Neptune, IX (1949), 122-129.

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

ing the old paying-stuff with scrapers. After this is removed they immediately start to put on the new compound, a mixture of tallow and lime, in thick layers with the flat of their hands. As soon as the task is finished, the dhow is kedged into deeper water, re-rigged, and is ready to sail. If no planks have to be replaced, this operation should not consume more than two or three days. A unique though rather incredible means of cleaning the bottom of an Arab dhow is recorded by Villiers,[10] who relates that, while becalmed off Oman, the sailors on the *bhum* on which he was sailing dived overboard, and scraped the sea growth off the ship's bottom while swimming slowly from side to side! The *bhum* in this instance was drawing thirteen feet of water.

All work on a large dhow is done by brute strength, and when the crew is working, the pace is very strenuous. All hands carry out orders day and night with the same fanatic vigor—it almost seems as though their lives depended upon the particular task they were doing at the moment. The *nakhoda* plays no favorites; when the tempo becomes too fast, those too old or feeble will drop out or be given a sea burial in a cover of palm fronds. Thus it is easy to understand why, when there is no work, all hands are to be found asleep. Thus have the dhows sailed for centuries on their unhurried voyages, and so they will probably continue for centuries. Of all the crews—Arab, Persian, and Indian—the Arabs from Kuwait attack their work with the most energy, almost fanatically.

At times the large deepwater dhows still have a pomp and ceremony about them that give them a dash of color never to be found in coastal dhows. Whenever coming into a large port that can supply the Arab sailor with the diverse entertainment that sailors of all lands expect after a long voyage, there is a great celebration. This consists of the dance so familiar among male Arabs throughout the Arab world—dull shuffling, agitating, jumping and hopping, accompanied by the loud noise of snapping fingers and moaning music from drums and tambourines. Sometimes the sailors get so wrapped-up in their dancing while entering a port that they are late in executing orders. Quite naturally, the longer a dhow has been at sea and the farther it is from its home port, the greater the celebration.

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On even the largest Arab deepwatermen, the crew has no quarters, as there is no 'below'; all hands live on deck, finding the softest place they can. Usually the sailor's clothes—a nightshirt-like gown or a sarong and

[10] A. Villiers, 33, p. 298.